

# History, Overview, Trends and Issues in Major Somali Refugee Displacements in the Near Region (Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and Yemen)

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## I. Introduction

This paper was originally prepared for the High Level Panel on Somali Refugees convened by the High Commissioner for Refugees to take place in Geneva on 13 and 14 November 2013. The Panel is part of a Global Initiative the High Commissioner has launched to rally international support for creative, meaningful and transformative solutions for Somali refugees.

Intended to provide context and lay the ground for in-depth discussion by the Panel, the paper overviews the nature, trends and issues in Somali refugee displacement in the near region while also touching on the pertinent aspects of Somali refugee displacement in other parts of Africa, the Gulf and further afield. It provides a brief overview of the history and evolution of the estimated 500,000 Somali refugees in Kenya, 250,000 in Ethiopia, 260,000 in Yemen, 20,000 in Djibouti and 20,500 in Uganda while including pertinent information on internal displacement. The numbers are large but should not mask the heterogeneity within each host country's refugee population. Some refugees have been displaced for three generations; others are recent arrivals. Past actions in managing displacement and return in the region are reviewed and the conditions facing the Somali refugees examined. It becomes clear that varying solutions may have to be pursued for different groups and some situations may have more or fewer options than others. It is however not the purpose of the paper itself to reveal the new solutions. Its principal objective is rather to extract lessons from

recent history and, in that context, begin an account of the challenges in thinking about durable solutions in the contemporary context.

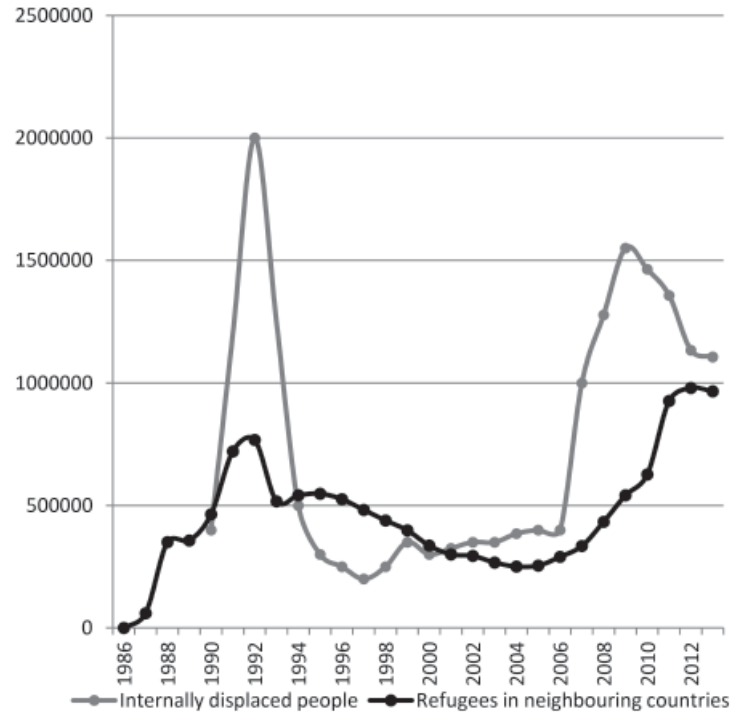
## **II. History and Evolution of Somali Forced Displacement**

### **A. General trends**

Somalia is often viewed as the scene of ceaseless violence and displacement since the collapse of the state in 1991. However, the interplay of conflict and displacement has seen different phases, configurations and evolutions. Prior to the genesis of the displacement that has endured to the present day, Somalia was itself a major refugee hosting country, the home to an estimated 650,000 Ethiopian Somalis from the 1977–78 border war with Ethiopia. Those most affected were people living close to the contested border where the fighting was concentrated. The large numbers of refugees in the country contributed to a distortion of the national economy as the Government's use of aid resources as a major source of revenue played a major role in incorporating aid into the political economy of Somalia, a trend that has continued to this day.

The genesis of contemporary Somali displacement is indicated in Figure 1 below which shows the fluctuations in the total numbers of people displaced since the mid-1980s. The graph shows peaks in both internal displacement and refugee flows during the early 1990s at the onset of the conflict and state collapse and between 2007 and 2012 when escalated fighting and drought conditions contributed to widespread famine and emergency conditions. It also shows periods of relative calm when migration slowed and returns to some areas were possible.

The first significant refugee displacements out of Somalia started with the events that would lead to the collapse of President Siad Barre's regime in 1991. Since then, Somali refugees and internally displaced persons have remained the most consistently protracted displaced population in the Horn of Africa. However, migration and mobility have featured as key elements in the political and economic history of the region for much longer. Since at least the 1970s, Somalis have been displaced at varying scales in response to different dynamics involving conflict, natural disaster, and economic hardship.



**Figure 1: Somalia displacement estimates**

Source: A. Lindley and L. Hammond (forthcoming 2014) 'Histories and Contemporary Challenges of Somali Crisis and Mobility' in A. Lindley, ed. *Crisis and Migration*, Abingdon: Routledge.<sup>1</sup>

### **B. Initial phase of Somali refugee displacement: 1988–1991 and after**

The principal causes of displacement during the 1990s are usually identified as a complex emergency involving conflict, state collapse and drought. However, beneath these banner headlines, it is important to look for the ways that these dynamics impacted different groups within the country. In the build-up to the collapse of the state, the government's manipulation of clan dynamics made clan identity a principal source of both security and conflict and access to political power (both formal and informal) and resources. The establishment of state boundaries in the post-colonial period also meant that many clans and sub-clans occupied territory that spanned two countries and thus were able to exploit economic, social and citizenship ties and claims in multiple countries.

As the state of Somalia began to fragment and collapse, and in the period following the collapse, people withdrew into their clans for security even as warlords and clan militia leaders fomented hatred between themselves and their followers to further their own quest for power and resources. Violent clashes between clans, combined with the effects of a severe drought, sent people fleeing for safer areas either in urban centres in Somalia or to safe havens in neighbouring countries. An estimated 250,000 people died during the 1992–93 emergency and as many as 800,000 refugees fled to Kenya and Ethiopia in 1992.<sup>2</sup> Nearly 2 million people were internally displaced.

### *1. Displacement to Ethiopia and Djibouti*

The civil war that ultimately ousted Somalia's President Mohamed Siad Barre and brought down the government began in 1988 in the northwest of the country, the former British Protectorate of Somaliland. The rebel Somali National Movement (SNM) mounted attacks against the Government of Somalia which for its part staged land and air campaigns against towns throughout Somaliland.

In 1991, the number of registered refugees in Ethiopia totaled 628,526.<sup>3</sup> Most of them were from Somaliland and other parts of northern Somalia who had fled this early fighting. The refugees lived in nine camps established largely along clan lines with smaller numbers self-settled in local communities. Significant numbers of destitute Ethiopian Somalis from local communities who shared clan ties with the refugees also moved into the camps and registered as refugees.<sup>4</sup> The camps also received some Ethiopian nationals who had originally fled to Somalia and were now re-displaced back to their country of origin. However, many of the Ethiopian Somalis who participated in this "self-repatriation under duress" settled in local communities.<sup>5</sup> UNHCR organized an assistance programme to help the returnees integrate into local communities. Over 550,000 were provided with cash grants and six months food rations.

Fleeing northward from the fighting in Somaliland, over 90,000 refugees sought shelter in three camps in Djibouti.<sup>6</sup> For a country of only half a million people and already hosting another 13,000 refugees from Ethiopia, this was an extremely heavy burden.

In Ethiopia, refugees arrived on foot in the camps located just across the border having traveled for weeks without adequate food or water, destitute and now reliant on refugee assistance. It took nearly a year

for emergency conditions to subside. High rates of malnutrition and mortality in Hartisheik A, the largest of the camps in Ethiopia, were attributed to inadequate and irregular rations, high incidence of communicable diseases (including diarrhea and hepatitis) and low enrolment in supplementary feeding programmes.<sup>7</sup>

Even after the initial emergency conditions in the camps had stabilized, life was difficult for the refugees. Relief distributions were sometimes sporadic, and most of the camps were located in remote areas away from any significant infrastructure or market. Over time, Hartisheik camp became an urbanized catchment unto itself, sitting on the border near Somalia and becoming a major transit point for agricultural products and imported items from outside the region.

Fighting in Somaliland began to subside in the early 1990s. Encouraged by improvements in security and wanting to escape the harshness of the camps in Ethiopia, an estimated 400,000 refugees returned on their own without assistance between 1991 and 94.<sup>8</sup> However, large-scale assisted repatriation was not possible until 1997 due to a resurgence of fighting during 1994 and 1995 in Hargeisa (see further below).

## *2. Displacement to Kenya and Yemen*

As momentum against the Somali government grew, efforts to remove Siad Barre from power intensified. The conflict spread to Puntland and South Central Somalia, causing displacement towards Kenya, and from Puntland to Yemen, to accelerate. Between 1991 and 1992, the number of refugees in Kenya increased by nearly 280,000. Refugee numbers in Yemen doubled from 30,000 to 60,000. Drought in 1991 and 1992 exacerbated the effects of the violence, and disrupted food production, availability of water for human and animal use, local markets and income from international trade. Pastoral and labour migration had long been “normal” coping strategies but such movement became impossible given the fighting going on in the country. This caused malnutrition and mortality rates to skyrocket and people to abandon their homes. One survey of a displaced camp in Baidoa town found under-five mortality rates of 69/10,000 persons/day—35 times higher than the emergency threshold—caused by malnutrition, measles and dysentery.<sup>9</sup>

It is important to recognize the ways that the conflict and drought affected Somalis with different livelihood backgrounds since this influ-

enced the composition of the refugee population. While displacement was occurring from all parts of Somalia, those from South-Central regions were particularly hard-hit, coming as they did from agricultural and agro-pastoral areas and thus relying on access to farmland and to agricultural markets more than their northern pastoralist neighbours. The south is also more heterogeneous in terms of clan makeup, and fighting between clans often resulted in the seizure of clan territories which deprived people of their main source of subsistence, making distress migration inevitable. So-called minority clan members—members of the Rahanweyn clan group and those who have come to be known as Somali Bantu or *Jareer* were particularly disadvantaged, lacking a political voice or armed militias to protect their interests. Their exclusion has continued to the present day, and their numbers are disproportionately reflected in refugee populations in neighbouring countries.

Kenya had hosted approximately 30,000 refugees prior to March 1991. Within a year, the number soared to nearly 300,000. Refugee camps were located close to the border with Somalia and along the coast with the Kenyan government reluctant to relocate the refugees further inland due to internal security concerns. Emergency conditions in the camps prevailed until 1993, with high levels of malnutrition and outbreaks of measles, cholera and other diseases causing many who were already weakened to die. In 1993, Human Rights Watch documented high incidences of rape, physical attack and theft in the camps. The perpetrators included local populations who were “as indigent as the refugee population but...not receiving relief assistance,”<sup>10</sup> as well as fellow refugees and well-armed bandits from inside Somalia.

Boat crossings from Somalia to Yemen increased during this period. Yemen hosted 30,000 refugees in 1991. That number doubled the following year, beginning a long and tragic story involving thousands of people drowning or falling victim to unscrupulous smugglers. In response to the influx, UNHCR began operations in Yemen for Somali refugees in 1992.

Once health and nutrition conditions in the Ethiopia, Kenya and Djibouti camps improved from 1993, donor support began to wane. This, together with a modest improvement in security conditions inside Somalia and return of the rains, encouraged some people to return to Somalia relatively quickly. Between 1992 and 1994, UNHCR carried out a Cross Border Operation into areas of southern Somalia in order to prepare for and facilitate return. During that period, 360 Quick

Impact Projects (QIPs) were put in place with a value of US\$7.9 million out of an overall budget for return and rehabilitation of \$35.6 million. It is estimated that more than 170,000 people repatriated during this period. Some found return unsustainable and found their way back into Kenya (see Lindley and Hammond 2014 forthcoming).

In 1994, six camps were closed in Kenya as a result of the repatriation and some relocation of people to the Dadaab and Kakuma camps.<sup>11</sup> A 1996 evaluation of the Cross Border Operation however noted that while successful in encouraging people to return the effectiveness of the operation was hampered in several ways. Three of the most important limitations of the operation were a) the likelihood of deteriorating security conditions inside Somalia, thereby triggering fresh displacement; b) the short-term impact of most of the QIPs such that they were unlikely to be sustained by local administrations or communities who were more concerned with their immediate survival, and c) a lack of collaboration with other organizations with a mandate for rehabilitation and development, meaning that “UNHCR in effect launched the project alone.”<sup>12</sup>

Back in the camps in Kenya, Ethiopia and Djibouti, the refugees who remained adapted to life there, however precarious and insecure. Unable for the most part to move legally and freely, seek employment, or engage in farming or livestock rearing outside the camps, a sort of urbanized, subsidized existence developed. Some refugees found ways of supplementing their support from their ration entitlements by working informally. Schools and clinics were set up to support the refugees. Resettlement to third countries benefitted only a relatively small number of refugees.

### **C. 1996–2006: Relative calm yet a still vulnerable population**

From 1996 to 2006, a period of relative calm prevailed in Somalia. The number of new arrivals to refugee camps slowed as people relocated on their own to urban centres inside the host countries or returned to Somalia to try to resume their agricultural or agro-pastoral activities or to take their chances in the larger Somali cities and towns. Many of those displaced from Somaliland were encouraged to return by the establishment of the Government of Somaliland and an end to the civil war there. In the southern and central regions, pockets of stability developed where effective local administrative structures were established by communities themselves. What violence prevailed was



relatively short-term and localized. However, one of the negative hallmarks of this time was the entrenchment of humanitarian aid inside Somalia as a key resource to be used as both a means and an end to obtaining political power. In the absence of government revenues and other economic opportunities, those who had access to this resource and who could use it to reward their followers, were able to rise to the top of the informal political and economic apparatus.<sup>13</sup>

With the slowing of displacement from Somalia to neighbouring countries and recognition that conditions in some parts of the country had improved considerably, the late 1990s featured a focus on organized return of approximately 200,000 refugees<sup>14</sup> from Ethiopia to Somaliland. UNHCR distributed cash grants, food assistance for a period of nine months and limited household items to returnees who were supported by the Somaliland Ministry of Rehabilitation, Reintegration and Reconstruction (MRRR). Their return was facilitated by provision of hundreds of QIPS between 1997 and 2005. Many of these projects have been criticized for lack of sustainability and failing to make a difference in ensuring returnees' access to basic services and livelihoods.

Security concerns and lack of administrative capacity prevented large-scale return of people from Kenya to South Central Somalia although smaller numbers went back from Ethiopia and Kenya to Puntland and from Djibouti to Mogadishu. Life after return proved particularly challenging given the extremely vulnerable state of the civilians and their inability to provide support to their returning relatives. Many people repatriated from refugee camps to Somalia only to become internally displaced persons living in destitution in and around urban centres. In 2013, thousands of former returnees remain encamped in settlements around the major towns of Somaliland and Puntland.

#### **D. Renewed Displacement 2006–2012**

The relative calm that had prevailed for a decade was shattered in the latter half of 2006. The Union of Islamic Courts, which had begun to set up an administration in Mogadishu and some of the larger cities and which had enjoyed widespread support in many parts of Somalia, was ousted by Ethiopian troops with support from its international strategic partners.



This perceived invasion of Somalia by a foreign army served as a rallying point for the emerging al Shabaab movement. Al Shabaab was a new configuration of hardline militias that had previously been active in Wahabist-Salafist movements in the country. It took as its *raison d'être* the defense of Somalia against what it called the aggression of foreign invaders. The violence began to escalate dramatically from the beginning of 2007, with indiscriminate violence particularly in and around Mogadishu prompting many people who had managed to survive in the city for years despite the insecurity to flee, making this the most violent period in Mogadishu since the collapse of the state.

People fled in stages, seeking refuge first with their rural relatives and, when the coping strategies of these hosts became exhausted, both those displaced from the cities and their hosts began the move out of the country towards the refugee camps in Kenya and Ethiopia.<sup>15</sup>

The spiraling displacement from Somalia was compounded by the shrinking humanitarian space for aid organizations operating in the country and the use of displacement as strategies employed by both sides of the conflict. Al Shabaab sought to prevent people from moving out of areas under its control which included most of South Central Somalia and Mogadishu until September 2011. The Transitional Federal Government (TFG) of Somalia sought to expand its area of influence by offering assistance to people in the few places under its control, effectively luring them into the areas it administered. As a result, large numbers of people poured into urban IDP centres on such a scale that the government lacked the capacity to respond effectively. By June 2012, ICRC reported that there were 368,288 IDPs living in Mogadishu, 40% of whom had come into the city within the preceding 12 months.<sup>16</sup> Some aid agencies were able to work in areas under al Shabaab control quietly and on a small scale, although those providing food aid and medical support (particularly vaccination) faced resistance from al Shabaab which saw their assistance as diabolical.

In 2011, the serious drought that had been building over the previous two years and the economic effects of the conflict and restrictions on movement and trade that had gripped much of South Central Somalia for the preceding four years resulted in the emergence of the worst famine the region had seen for 25 years. The interriverine areas of Somalia (between the Juba and Shabelle rivers) which are normally the most productive agricultural areas of the country were the worst affected. The use of mobility for strategic interests by warring parties continued: al Shabaab tried to prevent people from leaving the

country, attacking refugees on their way to the Kenyan and Ethiopian borders, and even carrying out attacks inside the Dadaab refugee complex. The TFG, with support from AMISOM troops, continued to try to attract people to areas under its control. These dynamics were abetted by international donor policies that prevented aid agencies from disbursing funds that might end up in the hands of al Shabaab, and by al Shabaab's decisions to ban most agencies working in areas it controlled. This effectively meant that most of the areas affected by famine were out of aid agencies' reach.

The result of these combined factors was massive displacement within the region: 113,500 new arrivals were registered in the Dadaab camps between January and August 2011. In Ethiopia, which had been hosting 40,000 refugees in two camps near Dolo Ado during 2009–2010, 100,000 new arrivals were recorded. (Smaller numbers were being sheltered in camps near the city of Jijiga in the east.) The Ethiopian government established three new camps to house them, but emergency conditions prevailed until at least three months after the declaration of a famine in July. A nutritional assessment of the Dolo Ado camps in Ethiopia cited early surveys among the new arrivals showing global acute malnutrition (GAM) rates of 50% (15% is considered indicative of a serious emergency) and severe acute malnutrition (SAM) rates of approximately 23%. Mortality rates for children under five were twice the level indicating an emergency, at 4/10,000/day. These indicators show how severely weakened the population was when it arrived in the camps. It took three months for emergency conditions to subside.<sup>17</sup>

Arrivals in Yemen also increased dramatically: by between 15,000 and 20,000 each year from 2005 to 2008 and, between 2009 and 2012, from 161,468 to 226,909.<sup>18</sup>

#### **E. The post-transitional period, 2012–present**

In September 2011, al Shabaab carried out a “tactical withdrawal” from most of Mogadishu under pressure from TFG and AMISOM forces which successfully gained control of many of the larger towns in the south over the following twelve months. These gains were accompanied by a political process that brought about an end to the transitional period and the selection of a new Parliament, President, Prime Minister and Cabinet. In November 2012, al Shabaab's final remaining urban base, Kismayo, was captured by Somali Federal Government (SFG)/AMISOM forces.

At the time of writing, the Somali Federal Government with the support of AMISOM is in control of the major urban areas in South Central Somalia. Al Shabaab however still controls large swathes of rural territory. Through regular attacks in Mogadishu, Kismayo and other cities in Somalia, as well as attacks in Kenya and Uganda, it has demonstrated that it is still a regional security threat.

Following the ejection of al Shabaab from Kismayo in September 2012, a power struggle ensued over the administration of Jubbaland, an area of southwestern Somalia which lies along the Kenya border. A fragile agreement is in place between the Somali Federal Government and Ahmed Madoobe, leader of the Ras Kambooni militia, which gives him authority as President of the region with some oversight by the SFG. There is some hope that greater security in Jubbaland may make it possible for refugees to return to that area and that the area may also act as a buffer zone supporting people who might otherwise seek refuge in Kenya. While this vision may hold some merit for the long term, the questions about exactly what the relationship will be between the SFG and the regional administration have not been settled. Until these relationships are agreed to, it will not be possible to put in place the necessary services and to ensure that relief and development organizations have access to the area to support eventual large-scale return. These challenges of realizing a functioning federal system are also key to promoting governance and return in other areas.

Despite the challenges the new government faces, the post-transition period has brought renewed optimism about the future of the country. New arrivals in neighbouring countries have slowed to a trickle. Host countries, encouraged by the SFG's successes and in response to public pressure over the terrorist attacks for which Al Shabaab has claimed responsibility, have pushed for the acceleration of mass return of the refugees. Perhaps out of optimism, but also likely in reaction to growing intolerance towards them and to the insecurity they have experienced in the refugee camps (see below), many refugees are preparing themselves for the possibility of some form of return. As will be discussed below, significant obstacles to realizing this ambition remain.

Since the escalation of displacement within the region, Yemen has continued to be a major destination for not only Somali nationals but also people of other nationalities who use the Somali ports to cross the Gulf of Aden. In 2012, three quarters of the more than 100,000 arrivals in Yemen from Somalia were Ethiopian nationals.<sup>19</sup> Yet, when the

violence in Somalia was at its peak, most of the arrivals in Yemen were Somali.

The crossing from Bosasso and other smaller Somali ports is notoriously treacherous. People travel in small, often unseaworthy vessels. They are often at the mercy of unscrupulous smugglers who abandon them at sea or push them into the water just off the coast. The Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat reported that between 2010 and 2013 “hundreds of people have been reported drowned or killed by smugglers. Upon arrival, some migrants report being held hostage in Yemen by the smugglers demanding extra payment/ransom. Equally there are reports of coercion, rape, murder, kidnapping, extortion and physical assault.” RMMS reports that reported drowning and killings have decreased significantly in 2013 but cases of kidnappings have risen dramatically. It concludes: “There may be a case to argue that the change could be attributed to the rising cases of kidnapping of migrants for ransom, which makes them of more value alive.”<sup>20</sup>

Many of those who make it from Somalia to Yemen intend to move further into Saudi Arabia but find themselves stranded at the border. By 2013, 25,000 migrants, many of them Somali, were stranded at the border town of Haradh. Many Somali refugees who remain in the country move into the capital city, Sana’a, to search for work. There, they must compete with other refugees including new arrivals from Syria, as well as with internally displaced Yemenis and poor local residents.

### **III. Current Refugee Situation**

Today, it is estimated that 1.5 million out of a total population of approximately 10 million Somali nationals live outside the country in what may be termed both the “near” and “far” diasporas. Approximately 1 million of those people live in or close to the Horn of Africa Region. The current Somali refugee populations in the main host countries can be seen in the table below:

#### **A. Life for Somalis in Refugee Camps in the Region**

Except for Yemen, across the region, camps have emerged as the principal model for accommodating and dealing with the Somali refugees. This has been not least because of the sheer magnitude of the problems. At the same time, encampment is considered necessary to minimize the

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Host Country	Somali Refugee Pop. as of 30 Sept. 2013)
Kenya	474,602
Ethiopia	245,068
Yemen	231,064
Djibouti	20,000
Uganda	20,000
Total	1,021,200

Source: UNHCR, Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat, 30 September 2013.

perceived security risks associated with the refugees or the spillover of the conflict from Somalia. Local integration of the refugees faces various legal, official and practical obstacles, including, particularly, in those cases where it is not officially allowed. The security services of the host countries have maintained responsibility for security in the refugee camps. In Kenya, with overall responsibility to co-ordinate the response having initially been delegated to UNHCR, the Government has increasingly taken over primary responsibility for managing the situation with the passage of the country's Refugee Act in 2006. Ethiopia has historically managed the security and administration of its refugee camps through its Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA), which is part of the Ministry of Internal Affairs with funding from UNHCR and supported by NGO implementing partners. Djibouti's National Eligibility Commission processes asylum claims but UNHCR provides most funding and logistical support to refugees.

Camps in Ethiopia and Kenya are located far from urban areas and refugees have faced significant constraints to their movement and their ability to support themselves through employment or production. As the capacity of the camps has been exceeded, opening new camps for Somalis has in some cases proved a slow and difficult process as host countries worry about the possibility that refugees will not repatriate quickly and will bring security problems with them.

The Dadaab and Kakuma camps, which in 2013 were the two remaining refugee camp complexes in Kenya, were established in the early 1990s to cope with the influx of refugees from the region. Dadaab was originally intended to house no more than 90,000 people but quickly filled beyond capacity to become for a time the world's largest refugee camp complex. Kakuma in northwest Kenya, which hosted not only Somali refugees but also those from Sudan and Ethiopia, was also strained beyond its ability to effectively serve refugees living there. Following the increased influxes in 2011, the Government

opened three new camps (Ifo 2 East, Ifo 2 West and Kambioos) in the Dadaab complex, but is still not able to adequately provide for the needs of all refugees there.

In Ethiopia, refugees are housed in camps near the southern town of Dolo Ado across the border from Somalia's Gedo Region. The camps are cut off from communications and trade networks and are not endowed with the social service and physical infrastructure that other camps in the region may take for granted.

There are significant clan differences between the inhabitants of the camps in the different host countries. In Kenya, more than half of Dadaab's residents belong to one of the Darod sub-clans, with 12% each belonging to Dir and Hawiye and 6% Bantu. One third of Kakuma's population is reported to be Bantu, 20% Hawiye and less than one quarter Darod.<sup>21</sup> In Ethiopia, it is estimated that 60% of the 2011–12 arrivals in Dolo Ado were from the Digil-Rahanweyn clan, which is looked down on by the other "majority clans." The host population around the Dolo Ado camps is not from the same clans, although some speak the same dialect of Af-May, which limits opportunities for local integration or self-settlement. In Yemen, minority groups are also heavily represented.

It is estimated that there are slightly more women in the camps than men, and that more than half of the refugees living in the camps in Kenya are under 18 years of age.<sup>22</sup> Approximately 10,000 refugees are reportedly "third generation"—they and their parents were born in the camps, and their families have lived there for two decades. These refugees have very different types of experiences and expectations of the future than those who have come to the camps more recently. Those who have lived in the camps for prolonged periods are less likely to have property and active social ties to return to. They have become urbanized through camp life to such an extent that it may no longer be reasonable to expect them to contemplate returning to Somalia to adopt rural (pastoral, agro-pastoral or agricultural) livelihoods. At the same time, most lack the education and skills to be able to find employment in urban areas even if such jobs were to exist—which at the present time they clearly do not. Refugees have expressed a desire for vocational training in the refugee camps in preparation for their onward movement (whether to their country of origin or to other destinations). Those who arrived in 2011 had significantly less education or training than those who had been living in the camps since at least 2006.<sup>23</sup>

For those living in the camps, life is a waiting game. As noted above, refugees are typically restricted in working or traveling outside the camps, although many do try to eke out a living through petty trade or employment in small businesses. Security in the camps in Kenya in particular has been a profound challenge: attacks on refugees and aid workers by al Shabaab as well as nonaligned bandits are a frequent phenomenon and have resulted in momentary suspension or restriction of assistance operations. A 2013 report by the Heritage Institute for Policy Studies, a think-tank based in Mogadishu, found that many of the estimated 15,000 refugees who have returned from Kenya in the past year were prompted more by refugees' concern about insecurity in the camps than by optimism about the conditions facing them inside Somalia on their return.<sup>24</sup>

Although the vast majority of the region's refugees have been camp dwellers, no account of displacement from Somalia would be complete without considering "self-settlement." Large Somali refugee populations, partly in response to the insecurity within the camps as well as to avoid the livelihood challenges that camp life entails, have chosen to go without significant international refugee assistance and settle within urban areas of the host countries. In Kenya in 2011, it was estimated that 100,000 Somali refugees were living in Nairobi. Large numbers were also living in Mombasa and other cities, as well as throughout rural communities in the northeast of the country. A directive by the Kenyan government in 2012 for all refugees living in towns in Kenya to be relocated to the camps was overturned by the Kenyan High Court but is now under appeal.

In Ethiopia in 2009, it was estimated that 160,000 refugees were living in Addis Ababa and other Ethiopian towns, unregistered and without assistance.<sup>25</sup> No attempt has been made to officially accommodate refugees in urban areas of the country.

An alternative model to hosting refugees can be seen in Uganda, where refugees are able to move freely between camps and urban areas. Omata and Kaplan cite figures of 23,669 Somali refugees living in Uganda—11,007 in the Nakivale refugee camp and the remaining 12,662 in the capital city, Kampala. Refugees in camps are given access to farmland: some farm it while others rent it out to other farmers. Refugees in the camps and cities draw on their social ties to facilitate trade and build businesses and have been relatively successful at providing for themselves. This model of relatively freer movement and



access to economic activities may be a useful model for other countries to consider.

In all of the host countries, most self-settled refugees lack proof of legal status. They face difficulty in finding formal employment, accessing social services, and securing legal redress, effectively living as stateless individuals. Undocumented Somalis living in cities face a precarious situation. There is increasing resentment on the part of host country citizens towards them especially following the attacks throughout the region for which al Shabaab has claimed responsibility. In the Kenyan capital, the September 2013 attack on the Westgate Shopping Centre was the worst but certainly not the first such example. Attacks have also been carried out in Mombasa and in the northern districts of Garissa and Wajir. In Uganda, an attack was carried out in 2010 on a crowded restaurant during the World Cup final. Local populations in all of the host countries also feel that Somalis place a burden on urban social services infrastructure and house prices. In recent months, there have been increased calls by the public for the Kenyan government to move towards sending refugees back to Somalia as soon as possible.<sup>26</sup>

## **B. Internally displaced persons**

There are an estimated 1.1 million internally displaced persons living inside Somalia at the moment<sup>27</sup>—most in inhospitable conditions in urban areas. Three hundred thousand are living in squalid conditions in Mogadishu.

Reports of IDPs being the victims of theft, looting, assault and sexual violence—including at the hands of security forces charged with protecting them—are widespread, and providing effective protection and assistance is a huge challenge for the government and aid agencies. Hundreds of thousands more displaced are living in areas outside government control and are thus out of reach of most aid agencies.

In January 2013, the SFG announced a plan to relocate people from the IDP settlements near the city centre to new camps on the outskirts of the city to enable reconstruction of the main business districts. Implementation of the plan has been slowed (but not stopped) due to protests on the part of the displaced, those who claim a right to the land being used for the new settlements, and by human rights groups as well on the grounds that security conditions and infrastructure were inadequate to receive people.

Return of IDPs is hampered by continued insecurity in the areas of origin as well as the fact that many people have lost their access to land and/or property and therefore lack the means to support themselves in rural areas. They also know that if they return to their areas of origin they will not be able to access most forms of humanitarian assistance and thus remain in the displaced centres despite the poor conditions there.

Solutions for returning refugees will need to be considered together with those for IDPs if those returning are to avoid becoming displaced in their country of origin or being forced to compete with IDPs for meager resources.

### **C. Global dimension of Somali displacement: A transnational community**

Somalis in many ways exemplify what the UN High Commissioner for Refugees has termed “Global Refugees.” As noted above, as many as 500,000 Somali refugees live in what might be termed the “far” diaspora,<sup>28</sup> with large concentrations in the United States (the largest communities being in Minneapolis MN Columbus OH, Atlanta GA, and Washington DC), Canada (Toronto and Ottawa the main centres) and Europe (the UK hosts 100,000–200,000 Somalis, and smaller populations are settled in Italy, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Germany and the Netherlands). There are an estimated 30,000 Somalis living in Dubai and communities in other Gulf countries as well, though many have migrated as students or businesspeople rather than as refugees.

Other African countries with significant Somali refugee populations include South Africa (estimated 30,000 by December 2013) and Egypt (8,000).<sup>29</sup> Many Somali refugees experience considerable hostility from host and other migrant populations in host countries who see them as competing for employment opportunities and whatever social support is available. They derive limited social and economic support from other Somali migrants.

Whether they are refugees, economic migrants or students, Somalis settled in the diaspora provide important resources to refugees living closer to Somalia through their remittance support. Remittances to refugees in the region are estimated at \$1.3 to 2 billion a year and are received by approximately 40% of the population living in Somalia. Funds received are spent on essential household expenses such as food, education and healthcare. In a recent study conducted by FAO,

one third of remittance recipients reported that they would face food insecurity if remittances were to be suspended. Remittances also reach into the camps. In her 2006 study, Horst estimates that 10% to 15% of refugees in Dadaab received remittances. According to a later study by the United States Bureau for Populations, Refugees and Migration (PRM), more than one-third (37%) said they received remittance support.<sup>30</sup>

The lack of a telecommunications network in the camps in Ethiopia has been cited by refugees as a severe impediment to their livelihoods since they are not able to contact relatives to ask for help, and remittance companies that rely on mobile telephones to complete transactions are not able to work in the camps.<sup>31</sup> In the DRC study, 10% of refugees in Ethiopia reported receiving remittances (most of these are likely to be refugees living closer to Jijiga in the east of the country).<sup>32</sup>

Since 2012, many diaspora Somalis have gone back to Somalia on reconnaissance trips, to check on family members and property, work in the new government or explore the possibilities of investing in the country. Much has been made of these returns as being indicative of a significant change in the security situation in Mogadishu and as evidence that conditions are now ripe for large-scale return. It should however be noted that most of these returns are undertaken by people who have permanent residence or citizenship in another country and usually are relatively successful economically. They have the legal and financial ability to come and go from Somalia (usually Mogadishu) as the security situation dictates. If security deteriorates they can leave the country immediately. Most would-be returnees from neighbouring countries who lack the legal and financial means to re-emigrate if they find return unsustainable would face a very different situation.

The experience of the wider diaspora shows that engagement with multiple places at the same time, the constant use of social and economic networks across great distances and international borders are important individual and collective survival strategies upon which as many as 40% of the Somali population relies in one way or another.<sup>33</sup> Recognizing the importance of managing risk and improving resilience by actively living in multiple locations, it is likely to be necessary to provide some guarantees for potential returnees to be able to come and go for a time until they are well established and the security situation in the country stabilizes.

#### **IV. Issues and Problematics Concerning Solutions for Somali Refugees**

As noted above, return to Somalia has been hampered by the rapidly changing security environment inside the country as well as by lack of economic opportunities for those returning to the country. Return to Somaliland was relatively “durable” if measured from the perspective of whether or not people re-emigrated, and by the fact that Ethiopia’s refugee camps, including what was once the world’s largest refugee camp, Hartisheik, were eventually closed (although hosting of refugees from southern Somalia continued and was scaled up from 2007 onwards). However many of those who were repatriated to Somaliland and Puntland continue to live as IDPs, in tents with limited water and food supply, in impoverished conditions.

Resettlement of Somali refugees has been ongoing over the past two decades. Between 1995 and 2010, 55,422 Somali refugees were resettled from the region.<sup>34</sup> The US has been the largest recipient of resettled Somali refugees. Other resettlement countries include Austria, Canada, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Resettlement is ongoing from all camps except those in Dolo Ado. As of mid-2012, DRC reported that 16,000 refugees in Kenya were being processed for resettlement.

Given the protracted nature of the displacement within the region has been the de facto outcome for many refugees. Those who have settled outside the camps have established social ties and many have built viable livelihoods for themselves in their adopted country. However, host countries are cautious about large-scale local integration. This solution is thus potentially feasible for only small numbers of refugees for whom return and/or onward resettlement is not practicable, but only if other solutions are being promoted at the same time for the majority.

A study by the Danish Refugee Council in Ethiopia and Kenya in 2012 found that one third of the refugees would, under conditions prevailing at the time, choose to be resettled if they had the option. A third said that they would return to Somalia and smaller numbers said that they would like to settle amongst the local population. If security and economic conditions in Somalia improved, more than half of refugees consulted said that they would opt to repatriate.<sup>35</sup>

One of the main obstacles to return is the availability of farmland. The DRC report says: “A significant difference exists between refugees

who arrived before 2006 (40% say that they had access to land [before displacement] and less than half of them believe they would still have access to it) and those who arrived in 2011–12 (80% had access to land, with less than half believing they would still have access to it and an important [unspecified] proportion saying they did not know).”<sup>36</sup>

Given a lack of meaningful durable solutions among those most commonly advocated by UNHCR and host and donor countries, many refugees have been carving out a solution of their own based on creative exploitation of the opportunities presented by having access to transnational social networks. Remittances from relatives living in the “far-off” diaspora—North America, Europe, and the Middle East in particular—provides supplementary income support to those living in refugee camps and in local communities in the Horn. Those who are better off financially often manage to move out into the wider diaspora themselves and become supporters of those living closer to Somalia. This transnational community provides resilience and a risk management function that enables people to survive in communities where employment opportunities are lacking, and for those living further away to contribute to and manage family matters, business activities, and even political engagement even while they live further away. Should large-scale return to Somalia become a reality, the involvement of the diaspora in helping to support returning relatives will be key.

Large-scale return will depend first and foremost on the ability of Somali refugees to return home in safety. This will mean an expansion of areas under government control, particularly into rural areas. It will also mean an expansion of government ability to provide services and protection to returnees coming to urban areas. However, in practice there is likely to be continuing and increased pressure from host countries and donor nations to find solutions to protracted displacement and ultimately for refugees to return to Somalia. Balancing these pressures with international responsibilities to assure protection of refugees and returnees will be a major challenge and there is likely to be an important role for regional actors (IGAD and the African Union in particular) in this regard.

With the implementation of facilitated large-scale return, the earlier-mentioned entrenchment of aid within the Somali economy would again loom large. Repatriation will bring needed resources to communities but will also create an opportunity for those who have become adept at manipulating, diverting, and benefiting politically and materially from externally provided assistance. Funneling of large amounts

of resources through governance structures will have to be accompanied by financial accountability and the ability to take decisive action in cases of corruption or fraud without which the effectiveness of any return and reintegration operation would be hampered and potentially further insecurity triggered.

## **V. Conclusion**

Displacement within and from Somalia is one of the longest-running crises in the world today. One in six Somalis presently lives outside the country. Host countries in the Greater Horn of Africa are concerned about the economic, social and political cost of continuing to provide protection and assistance to large numbers of Somali refugees. They are keen to see solutions which will diminish these responsibilities.

Many Somali refugees themselves desire to return to their country either permanently or on a part-time basis depending on their personal circumstances. Given also the different circumstances that have generated refugee flows, the different needs of long-stayers versus newer arrivals, the uncertain fate of the property that many have left behind in Somalia, the precariousness of the current security and economic situation in the country and the size and heterogeneity of the refugee populations, varying solutions will have to be found for different groups of refugees, promoting return for some, integration for others and onward resettlement for still others.

In respect of return to Somalia, decisions about when to initiate or facilitate repatriation, how to balance properly the requirements of return with those of national reconstruction, about meeting the needs of vulnerable IDP and local populations, and how best to promote post-return social integration will be exceedingly complex. Creative solutions will be required across all these questions and about how to enable transnational social networks and mobility to continue to function. Clearly, every opportunity to facilitate return in conditions that are safe, secure, dignified and sustainable should not fail to be realized. At the same time, as long as the reality of violence, conflict and serious abuses of human rights continues critically to characterize the situation in Somalia, pressure to end protracted displacement of its thousands of refugees should be balanced with ensuring that a protection space remains available for those who will continue to need it.

Timeline of Events related to Somali Displacement in the Region}

- 1977–78 Border war between Somalia and Ethiopia sent approximately 650,000 refugees (Ethiopian Somalis) to Somalia
- May 1988 Beginning of fighting between Somali National Movement (SNM) and Government of Somalia. Bombardment of Hargeisa and beginning of displacement of people to Somalia
- 1988–91 Influx of refugees from Somaliland to Ethiopia and Djibouti
- Jan 1991 President Siad Barre ousted from power
- 1991–94 Self-organized repatriation of refugees from Ethiopia to Somaliland
- 1991–92 Escalation of displacement from South/Central Somalia to Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti
- Dec 1992 US-backed Operation Restore Hope launched in Somalia
- 1991–92 Dadaab and Kakuma refugee camps established in Kenya
- 1992 Refugee boat crossings to Yemen begin to escalate (jump from 30,000 to 60,000 in one year); UNHCR opens assistance operation in Yemen for Somali refugees
- 1992–94 Cross-Border Operation for return of Somali refugees from Kenya to South/Central Somalia
- Mar 1993 Emergency conditions in refugee camps in Kenya stabilized
- May 1993 UNOSOM took control of operations from US-led UNITAF
- 1997 Repatriation from Ethiopia and Djibouti to Somaliland and Puntland launched (bulk of operation continues until 2000, small numbers returned until 2005)
- Dec 2006 Ethiopia invades Somalia, ousts Islamic Courts Union
- Jan 2007 African Union Mission for Somalia (AMISOM) led by Uganda established
- 2008 Dolo Ado camps in Ethiopia established
- Jan 2009 Ethiopia withdraws from Somalia, hands control to AMISOM/TFG forces
- Jan 2011 Distress migration out of Somalia to all countries in the region begins to rise
- July 2011 Famine is declared in 2 regions of Southern Somalia (Bakool, Lower Shabelle)
- Aug 2011 Famine is declared in a further 3 areas of Southern Somalia (Afgoye, Middle Shabeele, IDP camps in Mogadishu)
- Feb 2012 UN declares famine over, 260,000 people are said to have died; 800,000 sought refuge outside the country during the crisis
- Sept 2012 Transitional Federal Government cedes power to new government, with Hassan Sheikh Mohamud as President



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## Notes

1. Sources: a) Internal displacement estimates: 1990–2000 from Norwegian Refugee Council, 2003: 27, 40; 2001–2004 from Internal Displacement Monitoring Unit, 2010; 2005–2012 from UNHCR Statistical Online Population Database, 7 Oct 2013, and UNHCR, 2013. Where range given, mid-point used. Data missing for 1991 and 1993. b) Figures for refugees living in neighbouring countries (Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Yemen) taken from UNHCR Statistical Online Database, 1 February and 7 October 2013, and UNHCR, 2013.
2. According to UNHCR's Online Statistical Population Database, Ethiopia hosted 513,950 and Kenya hosted 285,619 Somali refugees in 1992.
3. Ambroso. 2002.
4. Ambroso 2002, 17.
5. Ambroso 2002.
6. UNHCR. 1992.
7. Toole and Bhatia, 1992.
8. Ambroso 2002, 16.
9. Centers for Disease Control. 1992.
10. Africa Rights/Human Rights Watch. 1993.
11. UNHCR 1996.
12. UNHCR 1994.
13. Hammond and Vaughan-Lee. 2012.
14. The actual number of returnees was much smaller than those who received repatriation packages, a reflection of the large numbers of local residents who had registered as refugees, people who had multiple ration cards, and those who chose to return to Somaliland on their own. Ambroso notes that the numbers of people on UNHCR-provided transport from Ethiopia was in some cases only 40% of the number of repatriation packages given (2002).
15. Lindley, 2010.
16. ICRC. 2012.
17. NutritionWorks 2013.
18. UNHCR Population Statistics Database.
19. Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat, citing UNHCR statistics.
20. RMMS. 2013.
21. DRC 2013, 30.
22. York University 2013.
23. DRC 2013, p. 8–9.
24. Heritage Institute for Policy Studies, 2013.
25. DRC 2013, citing Campbell et. al. 2011, p. 7.
26. See for instance: Al Jazeera, 7 Oct. 2013.
27. UNHCR Population Statistical Database.
28. For a discussion of 'near' and 'far' diasporas see N. Van Hear. 2003.
29. All sources: UNHCR Country Offices, figures expected as of Dec. 2013.
30. DRC 2013, 32.

31. Desert Rose Consulting. 2012.
32. DRC 2013, 33.
33. FSNAU. 2013.
34. DRC 2013, 26, citing UNHCR figures.
35. DRC. 2013. p. 8.
36. DRC. 2013 p. 8.

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